

*The Citadel, Estle City*  
*Selen*

String music played faintly in the background, loud enough to afford the small groupings of dignitaries and representatives a modicum of privacy in their discussions. The chamber was grand, the wide marble floor flanked with columns that made secluded areas and darker corners for the more secretive and paranoid party goers. Whichever Arconan had designed it in the past had frankly been a genius, getting around the usual 'a room with four corners and six Sith' problem by compartmentalizing. Along one side of the room were tables laid out, end to end, covered in light snacks, while at all four corners sat bartenders waiting with smiling eyes.

Principate and Dajorran officials alike milled about the room, a few ambassadors from nearby Hutt worlds shifting between groups with hunched shoulders, as if they could feel their slug overseers watching them. The Principate opening trading to Dajorra could mean many things to everyone present, a go-between for the Hutts via the Arconan system was one of many possibilities. All of these probabilities and opportunities filtered through the minds of the pair standing at the top of a short set of stairs opposite the grand entrance of the ballroom.

Lucine Vasano, Shadow Lady and noblewoman, tapped a perfectly manicured nail against her wine glass as her emerald eyes flitted across the crowd. Her people had been told to be on their best behavior, and so far it seemed no one was causing...problems. At her side stood her Scion, the tall and slim Chiss looking out of place amongst so many living, breathing bodies. They watched over the proceedings like a pair of hawks, knowing that no matter how negotiations shook out, this night was rife with opportunity.

"The Hutts will try to force their way back into Dajorra with these trade talks," murmured Rhy lance, standing close to her.

"The Severian Principate has shown to have little interest in dealing with criminals, at least directly. The Hutts will not be overt in their efforts to exert influence over us, Darling, as it would negate any benefit of trading with the Principate."

"Perhaps. As long as they stick to Ol'val for business."

Lucine narrowed her eyes and swept the room with her vision once more. Where was Port Ol'val's representative? She had specifically requested Tali Sroka's presence, making it clear that it was the Twi'lek who should make an appearance and *not* the Kaminoan that she so often let handle business affairs. Yumni was useful for the workings of a deal, but Tali was the authority at the Shadowport and should show herself as such.

"Where is that Twi'lek," sighed Rhy lance, mirroring her thoughts. Lucine opened her mouth to speak, when there came a tapping of staff on a flagstone near the entrance, announcing the arrival of another dignitary. The...chamberlain...as it were rose to his full height and rumbled

something out in Shyriiwook. The Consul sighed and squeezed her eyes shut, wondering who had told Kelviin to take on this role. At least his 'official' robes looked nice. When he finished speaking the emulator droid hanging from his neck translated, loudly enough to ring through the hall.

"Introducing, Miss Tali Sroka, of Port Ol'val," announced the droid.

"Finally," hissed the redhead, controlling the urge to head down to meet with the woman. It wouldn't be proper. She was the host, partygoers were by social contract expected to come and meet her and Rhylance, so they could be welcomed to the party. She heard a murmured 'oh no' from beside her, causing her to look back across the room.

The droid continued, "With escort, General Stres'tron'garmis."

Now the Shadow Lady's mouth thinned, for all of a moment, before returning to a neutral and welcoming expression for the crowd.

*Well this is curious*, she thought, seeing the pair walk in. The Twi'lek Quaestor had an arm linked through the Chiss's, and Lucine could just barely sense a smugness from her companion on the stairs. As the two neared the stairs, navigating the various groups who gaped either at the hulking blue man or the graceful Twi'lek, she was able to pick out details.

Tali was in a white dress, with a broad red sash around the waist cinched with a belt. White boots that clung to her calves, all the way to the knees, and what looked like brown leggings completed the bottom half. A silver-white tiara like accessory adorned her brow, and gloves of crimson covered her hands up to almost her elbows. Against the purple hue of her skin it was all rather striking. Her eyes slid from her former Aedile to the large Chiss, a man she had...regular contact with. He wore the formal uniform she had commissioned when he had been selected to take a more active role within the clan's business, deep black with red trimming, except...

Where normally the Arconan sigil was displayed on his breast, in a crimson that matched her own hair, was a flower of purple. That it matched his...companion for the party, her mind refusing to use the word 'date' just yet, was not likely a coincidence from the Scion of Garmis.

"Why do you feel so self-satisfied, Rhylance?" she asked out of the corner of her mouth. The man stiffened next to her, letting out a small cough as he covered his mouth. Whatever reply he intended to buy himself time for was made moot as the pair approached, the Twi'lek giving a curtsy with a dancer's grace, and the larger Chiss bowing deeply.

"Shadow Lady," greeted Tali, inclining her head as she dipped.

"Mistress Vasano," rumbled Strong, his hand over his chest as he rose.

"Tali, Strong," she replied, a smile on her lips. She stepped forward, handing her glass to Rhyllance without a glance, and reached out with both hands, taking one from each of them. "I must say I did not expect you two to come together."

Her gaze was penetrating, even as her smile was open and warm. The Twi'lek did not shrink back, her golden eyes peering back in. The two women had worked closely for some time; she knew that any resolution that was happening would happen behind closed doors, not out in the open in the middle of a diplomatic event. She wasn't Satsi. Strong on the other hand just looked pleased to be there.

"An honor to be invited to such a momentous event, Miss Vasano," he spoke, again his voice a low rumble. "We are, as ever, at your disposal to ensure the evening goes off without a problem."

"Oh, I do not foresee any problems, Darling," spoke the Sith, emerald eyes staring into Tali's golden ones, her grip tightening ever so slightly on the purple hand in it. "No problems at all. Why don't you two take some time to circulate, say hello and be your...charming selves."

Again, the Chiss bowed as she released his hand, though she tightened her grip on the Twi'lek's once more, nails just biting the flesh. It was a clear 'we will discuss this later' move. Tali inclined her head in respect once more, stepping away when her hand was freed. The two moved off, Strong offering the Quaestor his arm once more as they stepped down the stairs.

Lucine turned to see a smile on her Proconsul's lips.

"Remind me, once more, why you wanted Strong to have an official position?" she asked, again, all smiles.